

# Wiigyat – The Gitxsan Trickster

## Introduction: Origin of a Gitxsan Trickster

The story tells that a baby boy was found by a fisherman near a pile of driftwood on the shores of the Skeena River. The fisherman took the baby back to their village. The chief and his wife did not have any children, so they adopted him. The chief's wife named the baby Wiigyat. It was soon discovered that Wiigyat could not or would not eat, but he continued to grow. The chief and his wife were very concerned because the Gitxsan were always whispering about their strange child. The chief offered a reward to anyone who could entice the child to eat. All attempts were unsuccessful.

Then one day a tall dark stranger with skinny, scabby legs arrived by canoe to Wiigyat's adopted village. The stranger would pull scabs off his skinny legs and place them in Wiigyat's mouth when he thought no one was looking. The children ran to their parents to tell of the stranger's actions but no one would believe them.

It was then that Wiigyat started to eat. The mysterious stranger, who was really a raven, refused any gifts for his kindness. The chief and his wife were very pleased that their problem was solved and their child was now eating.

It was soon discovered that Wiigyat's ravenous appetite could not be satisfied. He ate all the food in his parent's home. He went and stole food from the other smokehouses and food caches. The chief gave away all his belongings as retribution for Wiigyat's stealing. Wiigyat's eating was out of control.

In the early morning the chief assembled all his people very quietly. It was time to leave the village and Wiigyat. Wiigyat awoke as the canoes were leaving. Wiigyat shouted for his parents to come back for him. The canoes disappeared into the morning mist. Wiigyat was all alone. Wiigyat thought that they did not hear him. So he planned to set off on a journey to find them. A journey that involved stealing, lying, cheating, bullying, greed and poverty.

## Characteristics of Wiigyat Stories

Much of the popularity of the Wiigyat stories is that they are amusing. The stories combine mischief with creativity. Another reason is that the listeners can relate to the Trickster or to the one that is being deceived. In addition, who among us does not enjoy eating? The Wiigyat stories teach lessons about the ineffective risks of being inexperienced in the ways of the world. It is important to be disciplined and learn the skills so one can be independent. Within the layers of the lessons, Wiigyat stories stresses the values of co-operation, the wisdom of looking at problems from different perspectives and emphasizes the importance of accepting the lessons life deals you, because that is life.



## Chapter 1: Wiigyat Visits the Shining Village

Wiigyat's father, the chief, gathered the people together. It was time to leave the village and Wiigyat. His eating was out of control and the resources were at running low. In the early morning while Wiigyat slept, after a night of stealing and eating, the canoes

silently slipped away. Wiigyat's mother had left some food for Wiigyat. He quickly gobbled it up and looked around for more. There was nothing left in the village.

One evening when he still had a home, Wiigyat had been outside the smokehouse waiting for the women to leave so he could fill his stomach. Wiigyat remembered the storyteller among them talking about a chief, in a northern village, who would not share the ball of light he owned. It was a time when the Gitksan Territories were still in semi-darkness. Wiigyat knew if he possessed the ball of light it would change his life for the better.

Wiigyat began his journey through the vast wilderness to the village of the chief who owned the ball of light. Along the way he ate berries and drank lots of water to fool his grumbling stomach. One day he came to a steep canyon. Discouraged and not knowing how to get across; he sat down and wishing that he could fly. He felt a strange sensation as his body transformed into a raven. It dawned on Wiigyat that he had supernatural power. It was a great discovery. Raven flew to the other of the canyon and wished himself back to human form.

After several days Wiigyat came to the outskirts of a village. Wiigyat was blinded by the brightness of the surrounding area. He remained in the wooded area and spied on the activities of the people. Throughout the day a group of young girls would come to the river to fetch water and have a drink. The girls would scoop up the water with their hands and drink and then fill their water baskets and return to the village.

Wiigyat decided that he would wish himself into a pine needle and he drifted towards the daughter of the chief who owned the ball of light. The young girl scooped water into her hand and she noticed the pine needle, instead of disposing of it she just blew it to one side. She drank the water and the pine needle slipped down her throat. On the same day, the young girl was pregnant. The people were amazed with the short duration of the girl's pregnancy. Wiigyat was born after a few short weeks and he started to grow at an amazing rate.

The new mother loved her strange son who ate everything she prepared for him. Before long Wiigyat was walking and the first word he uttered was Ye'e (Grandfather). "Ye'e, Ye'e," Wiigyat would cry as he pointed to the bent box that contained the ball of light. Wiigyat threw tantrums and cried for the ball of light, but the chief who owned the ball of light did not trust anyone with his prized possession.

Wiigyat's mother and grandmother pleaded with the chief to let the child play with the ball of light. After all, what harm could a little boy do to the precious ball of light? Finally, fed up with the crying and tantrums, and secretly pleased that the first word his grandson spoke was Ye'e, the chief reluctantly gave in to the pleadings of his wife and daughter. Wiigyat brushed away his large tears and started playing very nicely with the ball. Wiigyat politely thanked his Ye'e, the chief and went to play with the other children. He had suddenly started speaking in full sentences. The beaming mother was so proud of her son. "Look at him," the grandmother, scolded the chief, "he is so charming and smart and you wouldn't let him play with the ball of light."

Each day Wiigyat would ask for the ball of light and he would return it. One day when Wiigyat was bouncing the ball down the path that led to the river the chief did not pay any attention, after all his favorite grandson would bring it back.

Wiigyat wished himself into raven and flew away with the ball of light. Wiigyat's grandfather, the chief, was screaming, "I knew it was you Wiigyat, who doesn't know you?" Of course, he did not know it was Wiigyat, but he wanted others to think he did. The village was blanketed in darkness as raven flew away.

## Chapter 2: Raven's Accident

Wiigyat flew towards the Kisgegas River where he knew the Gitxsan would be busy with their salmon harvest. Wiigyat saw people below, there was not much light, except for the shiny ball in his mouth. Wiigyat did not realize that he was in 'the land in between'. This was where spirits that denied their deaths worked preparing their salmon. The spirits went about doing the same tasks they did while they were still alive. They were doomed to repeat these tasks until they surrendered to their deaths. These were the living dead, who refused to enter into the spirit world. They liked the semi-darkness in which they existed. They were not ready to go to the light.

Not realizing this, Wiigyat opened his mouth to ask if they would like to use his ball of light the ball, it fell and broke. The ball shattered into a million pieces. The larger pieces became the sun and moon and the smaller pieces filled the sky with stars. Wiigyat took a few pieces and placed them in his robe. Raven accidentally gave the gift of light to the Gitxsan. He shrugged his shoulders and wandered on devising yet another plan to ease his great hunger.

## Chapter 3: Wiigyat's Death

Wiigyat was very tired. He walked towards the West; this was to be his final journey. He was told that he had a brother living there in a western village amongst the Tsimshian. After Wiigyat was reunited with his brother, he felt that he had a sense of family and identity. His search was over. Wiigyat climbed the mountain and found a cave. He took two young mountain lions into the cave and sat one on either side. Wiigyat was a supernatural being. He willed that they be turned into stone. And there they sit to this very day.

## Raven Stealing the Sun

As Raven (Wiigyat) releases the sun from the box, he exemplifies the eternal curiosity of the human mind. The world of knowledge is the world of light.

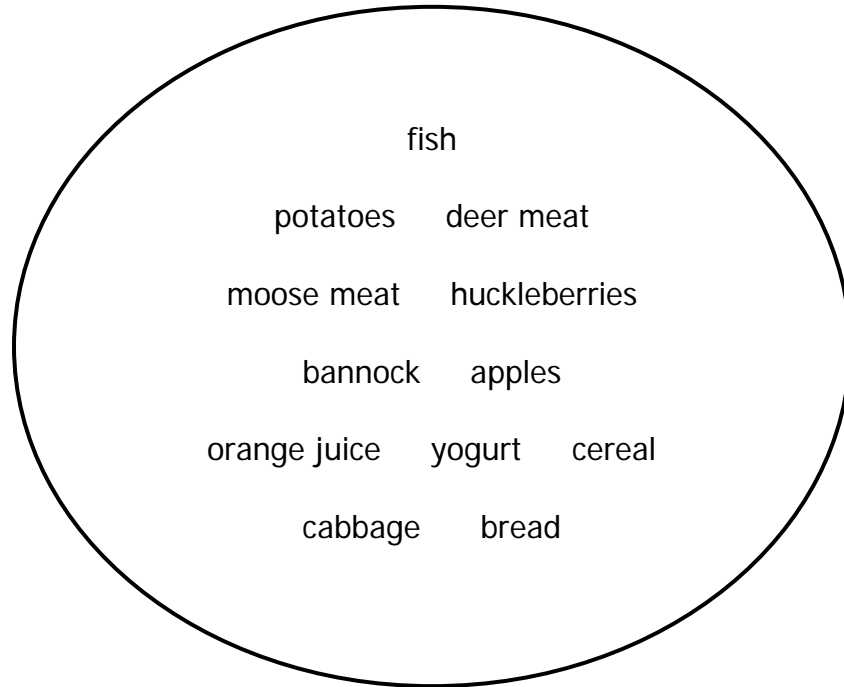


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# Wiigyat's Plate

Wiigyat always took more food than anyone. He also finished everything on his plate!

Take the foods from Wiigyat's plate and list them in the proper food groups.



Protein foods	Grain foods	Fruits and vegetables



The fishermen pull down a “yes.”

1<sup>st</sup> Narrator Well the fishermen are in, much to the disapproval of the Nutrition Spirits. Next up are the Gitxsan Grannies. I just know they will stick to traditional Gitxsan foods. They are so wise.

*(Enter Grannies with platter of bannock piled with icing)  
(Grannies are wearing kerchiefs and aprons)*

Goodness Sakes, they have plastered their bannock with icing and sprinkled it with huge flakes of chocolate and slivers of hazelnuts.

*(Wiigyat sniffs at the bannock, has a taste and writes in cook book)  
(Grannies high-five each other)  
(Spirits put their noses in the air and do a blocking hand)*

2<sup>nd</sup> Narrator Oh dear, the Grannies are so happy they don’t even care that they have offended the Nutrition Spirits. Oh, here come the hunters. They have their entry of deep fried garlic grouse wings and sweet and sour moose ribs. Yummy, that looks good!

*(Wiigyat is nodding, eating then he licks each finger and writes in his book)  
(The Spirits are shaking their fingers in a scolding way at the hunters)  
(The hunters pat each other on the back)  
(The hunters are wearing red jackets carrying spears and platters)*

1<sup>st</sup> Narrator Wow, all the recipes made it into Wiigyat’s cookbook. I’d like to try those recipes myself. They are all very creative. Wiigyat is going to eat all that food himself and he’s going to make a lot of money with that cookbook. Look, the Nutrition Spirits are leaving.

*(Nutrition Spirits leave crying)*

2<sup>nd</sup> Narrator Look, the Gitxsan are following the Nutrition Spirits. I think they are afraid because they have offended them. I hear the Nutrition Spirits are easily offended. Mark my words; there is going to thunder and lightning tonight.

1<sup>st</sup> Narrator Goodness, Wiigyat learned a lot of bad habits at Residential School; I thought he was learning math and reading. He has upset the Nutrition spirits and he even corrupted the Gitxsan Grannies. I never thought I would see the day.

2<sup>nd</sup> Narrator Please, pleaseeee, try not to be like Wiigyat. He is so bad.

And to all of you, who could see the Nutrition Spirits, keep eating right, and exercise every day. Get 10 hours of sleep every night. We need to cheer up our Nutrition Spirits so they return to us. After all, where would we be without them?

**Sabax**. pronounced  
*sah-BA*, meaning “the end”

Sabax